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TRACTS FOR THE TIME.

THE VIEW POINT OF UPANISHADS.

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PRINCIPAL VASWANI of the NAVA VIDHAN.

Published by
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Robert Louis Stevenson has a touching little story of a man, who went upon a quest for what the novelist calls the touchstone of Truth, "whereby the Seeming goes and the Being shows." Man has been in quest of such a touchstone of truth, ever since he rose above the animal to the reflective stage of consciousness. So in one of the earliest hymns of the Vedas man is represented as brooding upon the mystery of form and life and asking the question :—
"To whom shall we offer the sacrifice of worship."

These questions concerning the Ultimate, the Infinite-Absolute, the Eternal World-Ground are losing much of their interest today. Philosophy is regarded in many quarters, as concerned with the irrational word-concepts of the metempirical: metaphysics is condemned as moonshine and religion is at discount. Some like Comte confess the creed of positivism, some follow Spencer and build altars to the unknowable. Yet Comte's worship of Humanity and Spencer's Consciousness of the Supreme mystery were

* Address by T. L. Vaswani of the *Nava Vidhan*.

a partial, it may be an unconscious witness to the fact that man possesses personal interest in these great things of the Spirit. Much of the world weariness which marks the modern age is due to this—that modern civilization tramples upon the deeper truths and values of Life. Hence the special value of the Upanishads for modern life.

The Upanishads have their place in world-literature as much as the Hebrew Bible, the Hellenic Epic and Tragedy, and Shakespeare and Milton and Dante : What is the special stand-point of the Upanishads? The essence of Hellenism is the civic spirit, the subordination of everything to the service of the state, but the singers of the Upanishads felt that the political stand-point was not the highest ; the State is not the highest category of Life. The Hebrew Bible specially that section of it which is called the psalms is pervaded by two grand ideas (1) the idea of a God who is Providence, *Vidhata* (2) the idea of Righteousness. Yet it cannot be denied that the stand-point of the Hebrew books is essentially deistic; God is but a Being 'extern', a Lord entering into covenants with the chosen race. Jesus' grand utterance concerning the Fatherhood of God, his mysticism of sympathy, his magnificent nature-symbolism, his life of affection and filial intimacy with the parent Spirit revealed a higher type of religion, but the Christian Church soon returned to the deistic view ; for belief in miracles, in a sudden end of the

world, and a second coming of Christ became a part of the Christian creed. Matter was despised as being alien to the Spirit and nature cut asunder from the kingdom of God could have no interest poetic or scientific for the true seeker of God. The Upanishads are anti-deistic; they are as we shall see, charged through and through with the idea of *nature-communion*. Dante summed up in his *Divina Comedia*, the great truths of medievalism and in that passage of wondrous beauty, in which he symbolises Heaven as a Rose, Dante reveals a rare spiritual insight, a rare vision of the Beauty that is God. But Dante's Doctrine of Hell is unknown to the Singers of the Upanishads; they loved rather to sing the truth that man was a child of the Spirit; a spark of the Eternal flame. Shakespeare shows his greatness at once by his mastery of language and his grasp of human nature; but there is such a thing as *Shakespearolatry* and the literary critic must avoid it as the religious man must avoid *idolatry*. Shakespeare is not above criticism, The more one thinks of it, the more one feels that there is no *Shakespearian view-point*; he has catholicity but little intensity; he speaks on all sides, he is *voluminous* but not *luminous*; he does not set forth a *synthetic ideal of life*. So it is that the Protestant, the Catholic, the Agnostic, each has claimed him his own. Nor does Shakespeare ring with the religious cry of the Rishi's heart for a vision of Eternal

Unseen. Milton's poetry is unearthly; but his theology is defective; the modern age has outgrown the God-concept of the "Paradise Lost" and the "Paradise Regained," and Milton's claim to immortality must rest on his *style* alone. Of a loftier type to my mind is the poetry of Goethe; feeling, sentiment, and thought are beautifully blended in this supreme poet of the Modern Age. His Lucifer and 'Faustus' at last swept away into the current of universal salvation and again and again is his conviction uttered that all things come from God and unto God shall all things return at last. But not Goethe expresses so fully that idealism which pervades the songs of the Upanishads and which is of special value to the modern age.

The View-point of the Upanishads may be expressed in brief thus. *The Infinite is the Immediate*. The phenomenal or the sense-immediate is not the true Immediate. No phenomenon is self-sustaining; it cannot explain itself: so the ancient thinkers spoke of it as *maya*; the finite is not self-explanatory; it does not satisfy thought, neither does it satisfy feeling. Who ever found ultimate satisfaction in the finite? Browning's "Last Ride Together" is a fine poem in which the lover is represented as riding with the finite and feeling an oppressive burden. So it ever has been: the finite, the sense-given, the phenomenal, the pleasure of *sthula sarira*, the mass of sensations never satisfied the human heart. The

singers of the Upanishads wished to break the tyranny of the senses; they knew of the *dialectic of desires*; they felt that the earth's pleasures and honours lacked wholeness; they discerned the truth that the Infinite is the immediate.

Interpreting this idea further we come to the conclusion that the Immediate is the *Antaryami*. Emerson loved to speak of God as the Over-Soul. The Rishis of Upanishads sang of the *Antaryami* the In-soul; Yes, God is the In-soul of all that is. The doctrine of God's Transcendence points to a precious truth; for God surely is more than ourselves, more than the all. But He is not an alien over-Lord. Religions of power are apt to ignore the truth that the transcendent Lord is also the immanent Spirit. The power of the Lord is made manifest in us lovingly; each person is a starting point for a manifestation of God's Life. God is the *Antaryami*. God's life is immanent in us, sustaining the soul through all the conflicts and crises of her pilgrimage to the Sacred Shrine.

The question arises: what is the method of deepening and developing the God-life immanent in the soul? In ancient Greece, the self-realisation was sought through art; in modern times we seek self-Realisation through science and civilization. The Rishis of the Upanishads sought self-realisation *atmavidya* according to a method which I shall presently indicate. The God-life slumbers in each but is not made

manifest in any conspicuous measure except in a few :
 To express the God-life is to realise the self and to
 do this note the following :—(1) Cultivate reverence
 for the lofty leaders of humanity. Comte had a
 noble vision of Humnaity; the Rishis rose to the
 heights of a nobler vision. They saw the lights of
 the Eternal encircling the brow of Humanity; they
 felt that Humanity was the son of God. So it is
 that we read again and again, in the Upanishads, of
 the reverence shown by the people to a true teacher
 of the Good, a great interpreter of wisdom. Carlyle
 says in a beautiful passage, "No nobler feeling than
 this of admiration for one higher than himself dwells
 in the breast of Man. It is, to this hour, the vivifying
 influence in man's life." Something more than mere
 admiration was the feeling of the people to a great
 exponent of the Race, a true servant of Humanity.
 In such a one the God-life was made manifest and he
 received the highest homage of the heart.

(2) Develop *dhyan* or meditation. It is necessary
 to have periods of sanctified leisure and make an
 effort to realise the one Great Spirit hidden in and
 revealed through, every man. And never was the
 need of this contemplative attitude greater than in
 these days of haste and hurry. Meditation gives
 repose, vigour, strength of mind; it gives the
 larger reserves of character which are of great ser-
 vice in the conflicts and crises of life.

(3) Establish nature-communion. In passages of

great beauty the Rishis sing of nature-communion. And first, let us understand what is the basis of nature-communion? The Upanishads sing of nature-communion because they sing of *Ananda* or Love-Joy as being the heart of the Universe. Schopenhauer confounded the *Ishwara* of the Upanishads with his own *Wille Lu Leber* "the will to live" struggling, never attaining to a consciousness of unbroken bliss, a blind force, a non-moral energy. Naturally Schopenhauer fancied that the Upanishads were pessimistic. Yet read aright these Books will be found to sound the note of a lofty, sane optimism. Was it Goethe who said? "The highest we have received from God is Life" And the Upanishads say:—"All things tremble with Life, the life of the Universe" God's Life is *Ananda*—Joy. So we read "In Joy he giveth Himself to us." What is Joy, *Ananda*? The question is answered thus. Whatever *expresses* itself is *ananda*. *Ananda* is expression. Think of it for a moment and see how expression is Joy. The Artist expresses himself on the canvas and experiences joy, the singer and the speaker, express themselves and feel the Joy of self-utterance. God the Parent Spirit, utters himself in the Universe and nature trembles with the spirit of Joy. Nature is *ananda leela*, the love-Joy of the Lord breaking forth into different forms. Nature has often been regarded as little better than the sum of utilities, and so men have regarded themselves as her overlord.

This attitude of overlordship must give way to one of reverent love or there can be no nature-communion. This reverent love for nature expressed itself in a variety of ways in the Age of the Upanishads. Education was regarded as a fellowship with the pure and with Nature; so sprang up the 'Forest Universities' of India where the Upanishads were composed, and sung and taught and lived: so were built up the *tirthas*—the places of pilgrimage; it is not a little significant to note that all *tirthas* are places invested with some associations of great scenes suggestive of the beauty and sublimity of nature. So developed the sentiment that water, food, and other things were sacraments by means of which the soul was purified; so was matter regarded as something transfused with the Life Divine: a channel for the down-pour of the Divine Love. Man and Nature were knit together in the One Worship and the One Service; and sitting in the forest, or on the mountain-height or by the side of a lake or river bank man was not alone in his worship: he and they formed one chorus of prayer and praise to the Spirit Supreme. So we read "Trees worship Him with Flowers." Nature came to be regarded as Teacher, an Inspirer, a Healer of Man; so the great king Rama is represented as saying while dwelling in the forest during the period of his exile: "By looking at *Chitra Koota* I forget all sorrows of exile and I do not feel that I am away from home." But nature was in-

complete without animals; they belonged to the soul of nature and were loved with a wonderful love. The Rishis loved the deer and the cow as their own children and you will remember Yuddhishtira, as represented in that beautiful story in the Mahabharata, will not go to Heaven forsaking his faithful dog. "I shall not go alone" says Yuddhishtira; and he and his faithful dog together enter the Heaven-world. So vast and wondrous was the love for the animals that the people became vegetarians. *Ahinsa*, harmlessness became the essence of religion. If this doctrine of *Ahinsa* were more widely accepted to-day would there be the politics of passion and counsels of hatred which so sadly mar the life of the nations life of the world? The more I think of it, the more I feel that the Upanishads have a great value for the Modern Age. The one great sin of the modern world is the *denial of nature*. Physically we suffer from want of open air. Is it any wonder that we succumb so easily to cough, cold and chill? Disease is due to lack of fellowship with nature. Mentally we live lives of unrest; we are not at home with the Universe: restlessness is the malady of the modern age. And can it be denied that the virtue of simplicity is being steadily displaced by the follies and vices of fashion and luxury? Well did Thoreau write: "The morning wind ever blows; the poem of creation is uninterrupted, but few are the ears that hear it." If morally we have succumbed to the

temptations of fashion and luxury, spiritually we have lost kinship with the universe ; we are reluctant to worship the Great Life, the God-Life in nature. Zoroaster spoke the words of wisdom when he said ; Ye shall therefore hearken to the *soul of nature*. Let us build new schools and colleges in places invested with the beauty and sanctity of nature's life : let us establish Forest *asrams* ; let us give opportunities to the poor people struggling for existence in big smoky cities, to live fresh open-air life ; let us take steps not simply to develop the intellect but also to educate the heart. Through nature-communion will come to us a *love of the simple life* ; then shall we recognise the truth of the Upanishads. "The Eternal is one. He hath no Caste ;" then national education will not nourish race-pride ; then we shall re-establish our kinship with the lower animals ; and experiencing reverence for what is beneath us we shall have a true self-reverence which is reverence for what is within us and above us and around us ;—the Self who is the In-soul of all. A new art will then be born ; a new vision of beauty then shall come to us ; a new apprehension of Brotherhood will then be ours, a new reverence for man will then appear amongst men. Shall we not then secure a new meaning of religion, and discerning the truth that religion is God-consciousness, a consciousness that the God-life is Immanent in all shall we not rejoice in the thought that all the lofty leaders

of progress and thought and life no matter what language they speak, what costume they wear, what nationality they profess are really leaders, the elder brothers of each one of us? And shall not this vision of religion stir a new feeling of joy and love? Only remember this joy is not selfish hedonism; for the way to joy say the Upanishads is renunciation, not the *outer* renunciation of life and its obligations but the *inner* renunciation of selfish desires. Substitute aspirations for desires, and remember this renunciation is no ascetic denial of happiness but is something cheerful and positive; it is a protest against the *sense-view* of things; it is communion with the Whole; it is self-offering, self-donation, self-dedication to the Parent-Spirit of all.

Three years and more have passed since I returned with new experiences and new hopes from my lonely wanderings in the West,—returned to beloved India; and I looked into the eyes of men and women buying and selling in the market place. I looked and found them busy with many things but not the one thing needful, and with a mournful cry I cried “Where art thou O Lord! and where the song of the Rishis of the Past.” And I looked into the eyes of youngmen studying Science and Arts at the Schools and Universities. I looked and found they were eager for intellectual attainments but not for self-renunciation and the social good. And I looked into the many wounds with which is wounded the Ancient

Mother (for every bribe her children take, and every act of selfish strife is a blow given to her) and I looked into the temples, once the honoured centres of the sacred Light of Faith but now alas! the game-preserves of godlessmen, and I looked into the faces of poor downtrodden patient masses of the land and I cried with a mournful cry "where art thou O Lord and where the song of the Rishis of the Past." Can it be that the ancient music is stilled? Is the sacred song stilled for ever? I cannot think so; not yet are snapped the soft chords of our souls, for still if some one pure and devout a teacher of the truth, a *sadhu*, a living Bhakta comes to us and touches our soul-chords we give response to him and offer him the homage of our hearts. We are fallen, but under a merciful Providence that shapes India's life, we are being prepared to rise again and to play our part in the coming concert of the nations of the East and West. The ancient music is not stilled but may still be heard in the temple of the heart; for the Lord our God is within and plays upon His flute of love. We hear it not, being immersed in quarrels for honours and titles and the shadow shapes which come and go. Awake again Ye sons of the sages of the past to the inborn dignity of the soul; believe that life is more than living; realise your unity with the poor struggling millions of India's masses, give up sectarian strifes and filled with the sacred passion for social progress work patiently and

with faithful hands for this Ancient Land. Then, what then? Then the immense emotional sense of reconcillation with all. Then the Joy, the *Ananda*, whence has issued all that is. Then even as the Bride with tremulous lips and vibrating heart doth meet her spouse when the day's work is over, you too will meet the Lord and know that service of man with a pure and loving heart is the worship acceptable to Him, will know that fellowship with the poor and suffering ones of the world is the union with Him who is the soul of Nature and the deepest Self of man.



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